

## Key Criteria for developing Learning Goals

**1. Are directly aligned to the academic standards and the big ideas of a unit**

An effective learning goal outlines what students will know and be able to do as a result of instruction. Learning goals are developed from the standards, but standards are often written in vague or general language that must be translated by teachers in order to be instructionally useful. To translate an academic standard into a learning goal, teachers must work together to determine what students will know (the content) and what students will be able to do (the skill or process). By analyzing and clustering the standards into specific learning expectations, teachers narrow what students will focus on.

**2. Are focused on what students will learn as a result of instruction, rather than what activities they will do**

Well-crafted learning goals are specific and targeted to the learning outcome. Learning goals should not mention the activities that might take place during the learning process. In other words, learning goals clarify what will be different at the end of the learning sequence. Activities and assignments are the means to reach that end. One test to address this is to include the phrase “at the end of this lesson”, and then see if the learning goal still makes sense.

**3. Are written at the same level of understanding that is implied by the standard**

Academic content standards are meant to clearly outline the learning expectations in terms of the level of understanding that students are expected to attain to be proficient. In other words, what is the degree of rigor in the standard, and is that included in the learning goal. Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy (Anderson, et al., 2001), for example, helps teachers to target learning goals to show what you want students to be able to do to demonstrate the appropriate level of learning.

**4. Use clear and precise language**

Learning goals use language so that students will have a clear understanding of what is to be learned. A typical error in writing learning goals is to use general and non-specific language, often taken directly from the standards documents. To create precisely written learning goals, teachers must rely on their knowledge of the discipline, the curriculum, and expectations for student work at their grade level. Statements such as “students will be able to reduce fractions”, or “students will understand the history of our town” are not sufficiently clear and precise to guide or focus student learning.

**5. Help students make connections to prior learning and to envision future learning**

Clearly written goals help students understand what they must learn. This is an essential first step in supporting students to develop meta-cognition and self-regulation, as students must possess a concept of the goal in order to monitor their progress during learning. Students who are focused on learning goals develop greater intrinsic motivation (Ames and Archer, 1998) and are more likely to persist in the face of learning difficulties (Harlen, 2007; Dweck, 1999).

### **Learning goals are called many things in educational planning documents:**

Learning objectives, learning intentions, learning outcomes, learning aims, performance objectives, learning targets, instructional objectives, and terminal objectives.

### **Process for developing learning goals:**

1. With colleagues, work collaboratively to identify the specific expectations that are outlined in the standards or district curriculum documents. Decide which ideas and concepts matter most during this unit of instruction.
2. Identify the knowledge that will enable students to meet the learning goal.
3. Describe the essential concepts students will learn by the end of the instructional sequence.
4. Describe the skills and processes that students will use to achieve the learning goal.
5. Craft a learning goal that outlines what students are expected to learn by the summative assessment.
6. Explore the building blocks or incremental steps that students would take to meet this learning goal. (This will be used to craft a learning progression for this unit of study)

### **Checking back:**

Does the learning goal describe what students are going to learn during this unit of instruction?

Does the learning goal describe which ideas or concepts matter most in this unit or lesson?

Does the learning goal clarify the skills and/or processes that are needed for student learning to occur?

Does the learning goal align with the big idea of the unit?

### **A few words on “Student Friendly Language”:**

Learning goals should be written so that students can understand them. This might mean, especially in primary grades, that teachers need to re-write the learning goals in “student friendly language”. Remember, the main idea here of this is not one more sheet of paper to produce, the purpose is to help make the outcomes of learning more accessible to children.

To write student-friendly learning goals:

- ☐ Use language students will understand. The goal statement should be worded so that the student understands it *before new academic language* is introduced.
- ☐ The student-friendly goals should let students know the *level of rigor* that is required to meet proficiency.

Remember – start small! If you are like many teachers you have hundreds of student goals to monitor each year. If that is the case, start with a few important learning goals you want to better communicate to students and begin with those.